

Message Text

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FOL REPEAT VIENTIANE 1156 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BANGKOK MOSCOW
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QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1156

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SUBJECT: THE LAO COMMUNIST PARTY-MAY 1976

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUMMARY: IN THE PAST YEAR THE LAO COMMUNIST (LAO PEOPLE'S
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY) MOVEMENT HAS BEGUN TO EMERGE FROM THE
OBSCURITY THAT HAD ALWAYS SURROUNDED IT. CELEBRATION OF THE
PARTY' (21ST ANNIVERSARY IN MARCH OCCASIONED A HISTORY THAT
REVEALED PREVIOUSLY UNCONFIRMED OR UNKNOWN DETAILS, BUT EVEN
TODAY WE ARE NOT CERTAIN THAT WE KNOW THE FULL MEMBERSHIP OF
THE POLITBURO OR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. FOR THE LAO
COMMUNISTS, RELATIONS WITH THE LAO DONG (WORKERS') PARTY OF
VIET-NAM HAVE BEEN PARAMOUNT FROM THE BEGINNING AND
REMAIN SO TODAY; BY EXTENSION RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LAO
AND SOVIET PARTIES ARE CLOSE, WHEREAS LAO-CHINESE PARTY
AND STATE RELATIONS ARE BEST CHARACTERIZED AS "CORRECT".
THE LAO PARTY'S DOMESTIC POLICIES ARE STILL IN THE PROCESS
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OF DEFINITION, PROBABLY REFLECTING THE VERY CONSIDERABLE
TASK THE PARTY FACES IN TRYING TO MAKE LAOS INTO A MODERN
COMMUNIST STATE. END SUMMARY.

1. INTRODUCTION: IT HAS NOW BEEN A YEAR SINCE THE LAO COMMUNIST PARTY SEIZED COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY. DURING THE LONG STRUGGLE TO OBTAIN THAT CONTROL, THE LAO COMMUNISTS ATTEMPTED TO KEEP THE NATURE OF THE MOVEMENT THEY WERE SPONSORING OBSCURE. THEY CALLED IT THE LAO PARTIOTIC FRONT (LPF) AND ANNOUNCED THAT IT SUPPORTED POLICIES SUCH AS REVERENCE FOR THE CROWN, NEUTRALITY AND RESPECT FOR PRIVATE PROPERTY. SINCE THE TAKEOVER THE LPF HAS FADED FROM PUBLIC MENTION, AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY, WHICH THE LAO CALL THE LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (LPRP), HAS COME TO THE FORE. OFFICIAL STATEMENTS HAVE MADE PLAIN THAT IT IS MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY AND THAT IT MONOPOLIZES POLITICAL POWER.

2. HISTORY: THE LPRP'S OFFICIAL PUBLISHED HISTORY (FBIS BK231145Y MAR 76) HIGHLIGHTS THE PARTY'S CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE VIETNAMESE WORKERS' PARTY (LAO DONG). ACCORDING TO THE HISTORY, THE INDOCHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (ICP), WHICH HAD BEEN FOUNDED IN 1930 BY HO CHI MINH, ESTABLISHED A PARTY COMMITTEE FOR LAOS IN 1936. IN 1949 THE ICP SET UP THE LAO PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY. IN FEBRUARY OF 1951 THE ICP'S SECOND CONGRESS DECIDED TO ESTABLISH SEPARATE COMMUNIST PARTIES IN EACH OF THE THREE NATIONS OF INDOCHINA. THEREFORE, ON MARCH 22, 1955, "REPRESENTATIVES OF FORMER MEMBERS" OF THE ICP "FORMALLY FOUNDED" THE 300-MEMBER LAO PEOPLE'S PARTY. AT THE PARTY'S SECOND CONGRESS IN FEBRUARY 1972, SO AS TO "CONFORM ITSELF TO THE CLASS CHARACTER AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LEADERSHIP OF THE STRUGGLE", THE PARTY WAS NAMED THE "LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY".

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PARTIES: AS IS EVIDENT FROM THE ABOVE HISTORY, THE LPRP'S CLOSEST RELATIONSHIP IS WITH ITS "ELDER BROTHER", THE VIETNAMESE WORKERS' PARTY. THIS RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN SO CLOSE THAT UNTIL RECENTLY FOREIGN OBSERVERS ARGUED OVER WHETHER OR NOT THERE WAS IN FACT A SEPARATE LAO PARTY. TODAY THAT RELATIONSHIP CONTINUES CLOSE. IT IS PERSONIFIED BY LPRP SECRETARY CONFIDENTIAL

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GENERAL KAYSONE PHOMIVHANE WHO IS EITHER HALF OR THREE-QUARTERS VIETNAMESE. A LARGE CONTINGENT OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS REMAIN IN LAOS.

4. THE LPRP'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS OTHER SIBLING, THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, LIKE EVERYTHING HAVING TO DO WITH CAMBODIA, IS OBSCURE. THERE HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN AN EXCHANGE OF VISITS BY HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS, AND THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE ESTABLISHED EMBASSIES IN EACH OTHERS' CAPITALS. CAMBODIA HAS EVEN OFFERED AID TO THE LAO, WHICH MAY OF COURSE BE REGARDED AS A SUBTLE INSULT, BUT IS PROBABLY A TRIBUTE TO THE NEVER-ENDING AID-SEEKING OF THE LAO.

5. LAOS HAS FOLLOWED VIET-NAM'S LEAD IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE TWO COMMUNIST GIANTS. IT HAS CORRECT RELATIONS WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND RECEIVES SIGNIFICANT AID FROM CHINA, BUT LAOS HAS "TILTED" TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. SECRETARY GENERAL KAYSONE HAS TRAVELED TO THE SOVIET UNION TWICE SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC ON DECEMBER 2, 1975. (HE HAS ALSO MADE ONE VISIT EACH TO VIET-NAM AND CHINA). THE SOVIET UNION APPEARS TO BE GIVING A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE TO THE LAO, AND THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN VIENTIANE, AND PROBABLY ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, HAS EXPANDED GREATLY. IN A SENSE, HOWEVER, THIS APPARENT CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH MOSCOW IS PREDICATED ON HANOI'S ATTITUDE. ULTIMATELY THE TWO REAL RIVALS FOR INFLUENCE WITH THE LPRP MAY WELL BE THE VIETNAMESE AND CHINESE RATHER THAN THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE. FOR NOW, THE VIETNAMESE CLEARLY HAVE THE UPPER HAND.

6. THE LPRP'S RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD'S OTHER RULING COMMUNIST PARTIES APPEAR CORRECT. CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY, POLAND, CUBA, EAST GERMANY AND NORTH KOREA MAINTAIN EMBASSIES AT VIENTIANE. THE NORTH KOREANS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY ACTIVE IN THE PROPAGANDA FIELD AND HERE--AS ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD--ARRANGE FOR FREQUENT PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES PRAISING KIM IL SUNG.

7. POLICIES: THE LPRP SEEMS TO BE BENT ON ESTABLISHING A CONFIDENTIAL

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TRADITIONAL COMMUNIST STATE IN LAOS. AT THE MOMENT IT IS MAKING THE NECESSARY TRANSITIONAL OBEISANCES TO THE CONCEPTS OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF FARMLAND AND FACTORIES, BUT IT HAS GIVEN NO REAL INDICATION THAT IT PLANS ANY STARTLING DEVIATIONS FROM STANDARD COMMUNIST ECONOMIC STRUCTURES. OF NECESSITY THE PARTY IS EMPHASIZING AGRICULTURE AND LUMBERING, WHICH--APART FROM THE NAM NGUM HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT--REPRESENT THE COUNTRY'S ONLY IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC POSSIBILITIES. (INDUSTRY IS VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT, AND SUCH MINERAL RESOURCES AS MAY EXIST CAN ONLY BE EXPLOITED AFTER SIGNIFICANT OUTLAYS OF CAPITAL WHICH IN TURN CAN COME ONLY FROM FOREIGN SOURCES. WE ARE BEGINNING TO SEE PROPAGANDA REFERENCES TO LABOR-EXCHANGES IN RURAL AREAS, BUT COLLECTIVIZATION--IF THAT IS INTENDED--WILL PROBABLY REQUIRE A SIGNIFICANT ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT. IN THE URBAN AREA OF VIENTIANE THERE IS CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS ON MASS-INVOLVEMENT--EVERYTHING FROM MILITIA DUTY TO LITERARY CLASSES, WITH CONSIDERABLE RECRUITMENT FOR PATRIOTIC WOMEN'S AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS--AND ON POPULATION CONTROL. IN SHORT, THE LAO "REVOLUTION" IS STILL IN ITS RUDIMENTARY STAGES AND THE PARTY APPEARS TO BE FEELING ITS WAY IN POLICY TERMS AS IT INDOCTRINATES

THE RELATIVELY LARGE PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION THAT HAS COME UNDER COMMUNIST CONTROL IN THE PAST YEAR. (A MORE DETAILED DISCUSSION OF CURRENT PROPAGANDA IS CONTAINED IN VIENTIANE 1094, 080530Z MAY 76, NOTAL).

8. STYLE: IN SPITE OF ITS CLOSENESS TO THE VIETNAMESE QVRKERS' PARTY, THE LPRP'S STYLE HAS IN CERTAIN WAYS MORE RESEMBLED THAT OF THE CHINESE PARTY. THIS IS MOST NOTABLE IN THE ARMY, WHERE TITLES OF RANK ARE NOT USED AND UNIFORMS CARRY NO INSIGNIA OR DECORATIONS. HOWEVER, IN ITS APPROACHES TO THE PEOPLE IT HAS TRIED TO BE MODERATE. IDEOLOGY HAS BEEN PLAYED DOWN. PUNITIVE ACTIONS HAVE BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM, THOUGH THOUSANDS OF MEMBERS OF THE FORMER ELITE HAVE BEEN SENT TO THOUGHT-REFORM CAMPS.

9. LEADERSHIP: THE PARTY IS APPARENTLY ORGANIZED ON TRADITIONAL LINES, WITH A POLITBURO AND A CENTRAL COMMITTEE FORMING THE PINNACLE OF ITS POWER STRUCTURE. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE COMPLETE MEMBERSHIP OF THESE ORGANS HAS NEVER BEEN DISCLOSED PUBLICLY. IT IS APPARENT, HOWEVER, THAT THEIR MEMBERS DOMINATE THE IMPORTANT POSITIONS IN THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE. WE HAVE IDENTIFIED SEVEN POLITBURO MEMBERS FROM PUBLIC SOURCES: KAYSONE PHOMVICHANE, NOUHAK PHOUMSAVAN, PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH, KHAMTAY SIPHANDONE, SISANPHONE LOVANSAY AND SOUPHANOUVONG. SEVEN OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAVE ALSO BEEN ANNOUNCED AT VARIOUS TIMES: MAYSOUK SAYSOMPHENG, SOUK VONGSAK, MRS. KHAMPHENG BOUPHA, SANAN SOUTTHICHACK, SISAVATH KEOBOUNEPHANH, MAYCHANETHANE SENGMAHY AND KHAMSOUK SAIGNASENG. IN ADDITION WE ARE AWARE OF TWO ALTERNATE MEMBERS: SISAN SISANE AND KHAMBOU SOUMISAY.

10. THOUGH KAYSONE AS PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL AND LPDR PRIME MINISTER APPEARS TO BE THE MOST POWERFUL INDIVIDUAL IN THE COUNTRY, NO CULT OF PERSONALITY HAS DEVELOPED DURING THE LAST YEAR. HE COULD PROBABLY WALK THROUGH DOWNTOWN VIENTIANE AND NOT BE RECOGNIZED. IN FACT HE HAS NEVER MADE AN APPEARANCE BEFORE A LARGE MASS AUDIENCE SINCE ARRIVING IN THE CAPITAL.

11. COMMENT: THE LPRP ONE YEAR AFTER ITS SEIZURE OF POWER APPEARS IN MANY WAYS TO BE IN THE MODEL OF THE DULL GREY COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE 70'S. ON THE ONE HAND, IT SEEMS IMMUNE TO THE SHEER SAVAGERY OF THE CAMBODIAN PARTY OR THE BAROQUE POSTURING OF THE NORTH KOREANS. ON THE OTHER, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY TO INNOVATE IN ANY LIBERATION OF COMMUNIST DOCTRINE. OF COURSE, WITH THE VIETNAMESE WORKERS' PARTY LOOKING OVER ITS SHOULDER ALL THE TIME THE LPRP WOULD UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO DO

SO, EVEN WHERE ITS LEADERS TO DESIRE TO STRIKE OUT ON
THEIR OWN. THEY HAVE LEFT THE CAVES AND HAVE COME
DOWN INTO THE CITIES TO TRY TO APPLY THEIR THEORETICAL
LEARNING IN COMMUNISM AND THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE
DERIVED FROM THEIR LONG STRUGGLE TO THE TASK OF TURNING
LAOS INTO A MODERN COMMUNIST STATE. THEY ARE NO DOUBT
ONLY NOW DISCOVERING JUST HOW DIFFICULT THAT WILL BE.
CORCORAN

UNQUOTE. ROBINSON
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